



SAINT PAUL VISTA PROGRAM Interview Tips and Sample Questions



Interview Tips

As you are interviewing candidates, keep the following characteristics in mind for the ideal AmeriCorps VISTA members:

- Energetic
- Mature
- Committed to National and Community Service
- Hard-Working
- Self-Motivated
- Team Player
- Positive
- Strong Communication Skills

Interview Structure

Begin by introducing yourself and letting the applicant know when they should feel free to ask questions. You may want to start by sharing with the candidate information that they can take away with them: the job description, VISTA project plan, an organization overview, the Saint Paul VISTA Program one-pager, etc.

State the overall purpose of the interview: to provide information about your site and the VISTA position offered, as well as the Saint Paul VISTA program, and to learn more about the applicant. We ask that you review the Program's and your organization's mission and the benefits of being a VISTA member with candidates. We also ask that you review the AmeriCorps VISTA philosophy and the desired commitment to service. In reviewing the AmeriCorps VISTA philosophy, please discuss with candidates that AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. Founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965 and incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993, VISTA has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America for more than 40 years. Finally, we ask that you discuss the specific, or expected, hours of service and training involved.

Explain to the applicant that the interviewers will be taking notes and inform the candidate on how long the interview will be expected to last.

We recommend that the individual interview should last approximately 30-60 minutes. Take time to create questions that are aimed at finding the "best fit" for your VISTA position – these should align with the focus of the position, as laid out in your VISTA project plan. When creating questions for all interviewees to answer, create a scoring sheet to record how each candidate answers your questions and performs during the interview. A scoring sheet will allow you to look back at all candidates and review their performance and potential fit with your program equally.

Here are some suggestions to facilitate the interview:

- Take a few moments to familiarize yourself with the applicant's application and personal motivation statement. Note something to use from their background that will help put them at ease during the interview.
- When the applicant is answering questions, try to write down the applicant's responses in their words. At the end of the interview, score your candidate without discussing it with your interview partner. Indicate any comments, concerns or follow up questions on your scoring sheet.
- There are no right or wrong answers. The candidate's approach in answering is the key.
- Watch your body language. This may discourage the applicant.
- Timeliness is very important. Make sure you do not go over the determined interview time.
- Have fun with the interview!

Throughout the interview, look for the commitment level of the applicant. While the interview is intended to add to the totality of your information to make a responsible hiring decision, keep in mind that the interview represents one brief exposure to an applicant who may not have developed good interview skills or may be having a bad day. Some cues to look for are:

- Have responses to questions been clear and thoughtful?
- How much relevant work experience has the candidate had?
- What kind of volunteer experience has the candidate had?
- What have the applicant's previous commitments been?
- Has the person given examples of persevering in the face of obstacles?
- Have responses to questions been clear and thoughtful?

Closing the Interview

After you have asked all interview questions, do the following:

- Explain to candidates your timeline for hiring and next steps.
- Discuss the hiring process, with final approval granted by the Saint Paul VISTA Program and Corporation for National and Community Service.
- Let them know the date by which they will be hearing from you, regardless of whether they will move on in the process or not.
- Thank the applicant for coming in for the interview.
- Complete your scoring form with any last notes from the interview.

Sample Interview Questions

1. How did you hear about the Saint Paul VISTA Program and (*your organization*)? What is the number one reason you decided to apply?
2. What do you hope to experience or gain during your VISTA service?
3. How do you imagine participating in VISTA will benefit your future career and personal goals?
4. Tell me about your work and volunteer background. Include one of your weaknesses and your finest accomplishment.
5. Describe your ability to work both independently and within a team.
6. VISTA members often work with people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Describe your experience living or working with a diverse population.
7. What qualities do you like in a supervisor?
8. VISTA service requires a substantial commitment for one full year. How do you feel about this commitment?
9. VISTA members receive a living allowance of approximately \$400 every two weeks. How confident are you that you would be able to live on this amount for one full year?
10. What else do you believe is important for me to know as I consider your application?
11. What questions do you have about VISTA and/or (*your organization*)?